Use of Electronic Information Resources by Distance Learners: A Case Study of IGNOU

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Abstract: *This study was a survey of distance learners' use of the electronic information resources at the IGNOU Regional Centre and Study Centres, Ranchi. A total of 100 responded learners which were randomly selected. A copy of a structured questionnaire by the researchers was used for data collection while simple percentage was used for data analysis. The findings revealed that majority of the sampled distance learners made used of electronic information resources. The findings also indicated that the electronic information resources were available at the library and used them majorly for their study purposes. It was also found that the distance learners preferred the electronic resources for research because they are less expensive, more informative, more useful and time saving. Factors hindering effective use of the library electronic information resources included power outage, slow download, low bandwidth and lack of computer systems. The study recommended amongst others training for distance learners on effective use of library electronic resources in the library.*

Keywords: ICT, Electronic Information Resources, Distance Learners, IGNOU

1. Introduction

Technology has penetrated all aspects of human life for social development. Libraries generally are not excluded from these transformations. The use of information communication technology (ICT) has influenced work procedures and approaches in librarianship. Libraries now use ICT for improved service provision and to satisfy diverse user needs such as Academics, Learners and Researcher. Libraries have transformed into digital and virtual libraries where books, journals and magazines have been transformed into e-books, e-journals and so on. Similarly, reference materials, such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, handbooks and so on, as well as abstracting and indexing services are continuity and the relevance of academics in any university system depends on the ability to exploit resources available in print or electronic formats.

Information and its usage are lifeless. In fact, there might be communication without information. Embracing technology has led to the dissemination of electronic information resources. Popoola (2008) comments that the quality of teaching, research and the social work of social scientists in each university system depends on information and services. Popoola (2008) stated that accessibility and use of information were essential to the social teaching and research activities of Nigerian university systems. Okiki (2011) stressed that information is the backbone of society's survival. According to him, information remains an important element in decision-making and also helps to reduce uncertainty. Electronic resources available to students by the school staff include CDM database, e-mail catalog (OPAC), and the Internet. The Internet, the most important source of these sources, has made it accessible to e-mails, books, magazines, electronics, databases, and search engines. These resources are electronic information resources.

Therefore, this study was designed to examine the use of library electronic information resources by distance learners of IGNOU Regional Centres and Study Centres, Ranchi.

2. Objective of the Study

This study aimed at examining use of electronic information resources by Distance Learners of IGNOU Regional Centre, Ranchi. In view of this, the following specific objective will be looked into:
1) To identify the frequency at which the distance learners make use of electronic information resources
2) To examine availability of electronic information resources
3) To identify the purpose of use of electronic information resources by distance learners
4) To identify reasons of use of electronic information resources by distance learners.
5) To identify factors limiting the use of electronic information resources by distance learners

3. Scope and Limitation

The scope is confined to the distance learners (MCA Programme) Of IGNOU Regional Centre, Ranchi. Hence, the study is limited to the availability and use of electronic resources from Regional Centre Library and other Libraries.

4. Methodology

To meet the objectives of study and to reply its research question, a questionnaire methods has been designed and adopted for surveying. The questionnaire has been distributed to the distance learners (MCA Programme) users. The questionnaire were distributed personally to these distance learners totaling about 120. Out of 100 learners returned the questionnaire duly filled in.

5. Review of Literature

An electronic resource is any information source that a library provides access to in an electronic format. It could also mean any material in digital format that are accessible electronically. Any library especially academic library purchases subscription to many electronic information resources in order to provide members of the academic community (students and most especially academic staff) access to them free of charge. There are also some electronic resources which are freely available are accessed by the academic community and students community. When these electronic resources are acquired, maintained and controlled at the library, they become the library's electronic resources. Examples include e-full text journals, e-books, e-technical and e-research journals, e-newspaper, e-dictionaries, e-encyclopedias, digital images, online databases in varied digital formats, Adobe documents, web pages (.htm, .html, .asp, and so on) to mention a few. Due to licensing agreement regulations, only faculty, students and staff can access library resources. Many of the databases allow users to create personal profile in order to keep tracts of new contents facilitated through electronic mails of RSS feeds.

Electronic information resources are products of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and they have been found to be relevant to the teaching, learning and research processes in universities. According to Meadow and Yuan (1997) as reported by Popoola (2008), information is a message that changes the recipient's knowledge base. This means that information increases significantly the existing knowledge of the user. The information resources and services available in academic and research libraries are therefore expected to be able to support the teaching and research activities of the parent institutions. Library electronic information resources are expected to be acquired, organized in retrievable formats and made accessible to the academic staff and researchers to conduct teaching and research activities. The ability of the academic libraries to carry out these functions effectively depends on availability and accessibility to information resources such as books, journals, research and technical reports, conference proceedings, theses, dissertations, periodicals, reference sources, microforms, ICT and staff. It has been established by studies such as those of Ibeun (1995; 2005), Popoola and Zaid (2007) that the ability of libraries to render effective information services, such as current awareness, documents delivery, photocopy services, Internet and E-mail, facsimile, selective dissemination of information (SDI), bindery, online database searching, translation, technical report writing, user education, current contents listing, consultancy and so on has correlation with resources' availability.

The quality of teaching, learning, and research in any institution or research depends on a large library of resources and services. The availability of information, access and use are critical for effective learning, teaching and research. Popoola (2008) showed that high-tech scientists had more information than their colleagues. The diversity of this information is considered here in terms of the abundance of available and available resources to users information as well as their quality related to their intellectual content. Attention was paid to the royal dynasty

regarding the scope and authority of the author. If the institutional information services do not meet the needs of the staff, they will use the other available systems. The change from printing to electronic information as a result of advances in information technology and communications gives the user access to extensive information. However, Roy (2006), discussing access to information proposed by Dud, said that it was based on receiving relevant resources at the right time.

This concern stems from the idea that the Internet could provide access to a vast array of information resources. However, because of information overload, it does not necessarily provide access to useful, current, reliable and affordable information and at the right time. Agba, Kigongo-Bukenya and Nyumba (2004) asserted that the shift from print to electronic information means that both academic staff and students in a university system must use these resources for better quality, efficient and effective research more than ever. They should, however, be used with a high sense of evaluation because the information resources and services available in the institutional information systems must be capable of supporting research activities in the institutions. Information is an essential commodity that is needed for improved teaching and research productivity of academic staff and researchers. Popoola (2008) found out that there are main and interaction effects of the use of information sources and services on research output of academic staff. He concluded that the use of information sources or services will improve the research output of the researchers. He further stated that if the information sources and services available in the institutional information systems or elsewhere are used by academic staff, their research output will be more significantly enhanced.

Libraries are now investing heavily on electronic resources especially academic libraries where users are exposed to various electronic resources outlets via Internet. This development is noticeable in the developed nations of the world. India and other developing nations are still struggling to bridge the digital divide that is preventing them from the full benefits of electronic era.

According to Bar-Ilan, Peritz, and Wolman (2003), the most active users of electronic journals are the younger members of the teaching and research staff. In a related study, Bush (2004) showed that age was not an influential factor in whether the respondents read articles on paper or in electronic format. Brennan et al (2002) in a study that centered on how the adoption of electronic information resources affected academics' information behaviour revealed that faculty made fewer visits to the library and read more than in the print era across a broader number of journals. Most academics reported using generic databases to locate information, while a few relied on smaller discipline-specific databases. The literature on electronic resources reported the following user-centered barriers to e-resources use included: a lack of skills in how to use information sources, a lack of appropriate reward for electronic scholarly communication, a lack of consistent technical support and provision and a lack of time to spend on searching for information.

6. Data Analysis and Interpreted

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by sex

Sex	Frequency	%
Male	65	65
Female	35	35
Total	**100**	**100**

In Table 1, 65% are responded by Male member and 35% by Female member.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by age

Age	Frequency	%
Under 25 years	55	55
25-30	28	28
30-35	12	12
35-50	05	05
Total	**100**	**100**

In Table 2, it reveals that Under 25 years age, the responded are 55% while 25-30 years it is 28%, from 30-35 it is 12% and from 30-50 years, it is 5% only.

Table 3 Distribution of respondents by educational qualification

Qualification	Frequency	%
BA	47	47
BSC	28	28
BCOM	15	15
BCA	10	10
TOTAL	100	100

In Table 3, the Educational qualification of the MCA appearing distance learners are BA (57%), BSC(28%) and BCOM (15%) and BCA(10%)

Table 4: Frequency of use of Electronic Information Resources

Parameter	Frequency	%
Every Day	15	15
Twice a week	40	40
Weekly	22	22
Monthly	10	10
Quarterly	13	13
Never	00	00
Total	100	100

In Table 4, Frequecy of use of Electronic Information Resources are in Every day i.e.15%, Twice a week (40%) the maximum, and weekly by 22%, Monthly (10%), Quarterly(13%).

Table 5: Availability of Electronic Information Resources

Parameter	Frequency	%
Very Much Available	43	43
Available	46	46
Not Available	07	07
Undecided	04	04
Total	**100**	**100**

In table 5, Availability of Electronic Information Resources in the Library, Very much available i.e. 43% while Available (46%), Not Avaibale as per demand (7%) and Undecided (4%).

Table 6: Purpose of using Electronic information Resources

Purpose	Number of Responds
To Know the latest information	47 (47 %)
Total prepare for project reports	19 (19 %)
For communication	10 (10 %)
For Carrier development	10 (10 %)
To gain current and General Information	13 (13 %)
Others: Technical and Management sites	01 (01 %)
Total	100 (100.00 %)

Note- Total sample exceed the required size the questions are of multiple choice. The purpose of using the e- resources differ from one user to another.Table-6 Indicates 47 % of users are using to know the latest information and 19 % of them are using for preparation of project reports and 13 % using to gain current and general information.

Table 7: Reasons for use of electronic resources by Distance Learners

Reason For E-Resources	Frequency	%
Time Saving	85	85
Time Consuming	03	03
Easy To Use	80	80
Difficult to use	05	05
More Informative	88	88
More expensive	45	45
Less Expensive	23	23
More useful	82	82
Less Useful	02	02

In Table 7, Reasons for using of electronic Information Resources by Distance Learners are revealed that Time Saving (85%), Easy to Use (80%), More Informative (88%), More Useful(82%) while Time Consuming(3%), Dificult to use(5%), Less Expensive (23%), Less Useful(2%).

Table 8: Assistance taken while using e-resources

Reasons	Number of Responds	%
Library Staff	52	52
Staff of computer Deptt	17	17
Friends	23	23
Not responded	08	08
others	00	00

Table-8: Indicates that majority 52(52%) of the users taking assistance from "Library Staff" and 23 (23%) of them are taking assistance from friends"

Table 9: Factors limiting usage of electronic information resources by academic staff

Hindrances	Frequency	%
Limited computer system	22	22
Power outage	58	58
Slow download	20	20
Total	**100**	**100**

In Table 9, Factors Limiting to use of Electronic Information Resources by Distance Learners are Limited Computer system(22%) while Power Outage(58%) and Slow Download (20%).

7. Conclusion

In recent years information such an extent that their impact on libraries is significant. Specially development regarding digital libraries, Internet, electronic Publications, CD ROMs etc., have forced the libraries to change the way are now functioning. Finally it has been observed that e- resources are more useful for their study. It is concluded that main intention of using e-resources of the distance learners' is preparing for their study.

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